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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

*Memorandum*



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600  
15 September 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
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HIGHLIGHTS

The large-scale US/ARVN search-and-destroy operation in Binh Duong Province continues into the third day without having made significant contact with the estimated 10,000 Viet Cong in the area. In North Vietnam, government spokesmen called a special press conference on 15 September to express concern over the damage which has been inflicted recently on the North Vietnamese dam and dike system. Although the North Vietnamese seem to be exaggerating the extent of the damage, the protest indicates Hanoi's concern over the possibility that the present pattern of bombing may be intended to disrupt agricultural production and the food supply.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

The large-scale US/ARVN search-and-destroy operation near the district capital of Ben Cat, in Binh Duong Province, entered its third day today without significant opposition from an estimated 10,000 Viet Cong troops believed to be in the area (Para. 1). Headquarters, US 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) opened its command post at An Khe, in central coastal Binh Dinh Province yesterday (Para. 2). Paratroop elements of the US 101st Airborne Brigade have successfully completed a battalion-sized ground sweep 15 miles northeast of An Khe (Para. 3). Guam-based USAF B-52 Stratofortresses early today attacked a suspected Viet Cong training, communications, and support area in the guerrilla-infested War Zone "D" stronghold, northeast of Saigon (Para. 4). The central highlands provincial capital of Pleiku city has been placed off limits for US military personnel because of internal feuding between Vietnamese military units garrisoned there (Para. 5). Recently observed Viet Cong tactics in South Vietnam now include the use of dogs to alert guerrilla units to the presence of government troops in their area and the use of children to mark government defensive positions (Para. 7). MACV's Weekly Military Report for 4-11 September concludes that the

continued absence of large-scale Communist activity throughout South Vietnam indicates that the Viet Cong are in an extended period of re-evaluating plans and programs as well as re-equipping and re-aligning their units; enemy activity during the week was characterized primarily by small-scale acts of terrorism, harassment, and sabotage, with only seven armed attacks reported, none of which was of company- or battalion-strength (Paras. 8-9). Government forces clearly retained the initiative in military operations conducted during 4-11 September (Para. 10). The current status of South Vietnam's major transportation routes and the coastal railroad has been reported (Para. 11). ARVN, Viet Cong, and US personnel and weapons losses sustained during 4-11 September have been received (Paras. 12-14).

## II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

Ambassador Lodge reports that he was particularly impressed on his recent visit to Da Nang and Qui Nhon in the north by the good relations between US and Vietnamese forces and the beneficial effect of the US ground performance on the RVNAF (Para. 1). Government officials, including Premier Ky, staged a ceremony in the central highlands today to dramatize the return of some 400 dissident tribesmen who recently surrendered to government troops (Para. 2). The Saigon government plans shortly to establish a permanent rice bureau as part of its policy of increased control over the rice trade (Paras. 3-4).

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## IV. Other Communist Military Developments:

Nothing of significance to report.

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V. Communist Political Developments: North Vietnamese spokesmen express concern over bomb damage to the dam and dike system (Paras. 1-2). A delegation of NFLSV officials are presently touring eastern Europe in an apparent attempt to gain wider support for the Viet Cong position (Para. 3). The Soviets continue to play down the extent of their involvement in Vietnam (Para. 4).

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## I. MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The large-scale coordinated US/ARVN search-and-destroy operation near the district capital of Ben Cat, in Binh Duong Province, entered its third day today without significant opposition from an estimated 10,000 Viet Cong believed to be in the area. Deployment of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade (Reinforced) into the operational zone was completed yesterday with only light enemy sniper fire encountered. No US or ARVN casualties have been reported thus far; however, two New Zealanders were killed yesterday when their jeep detonated a Viet Cong land mine.

2. Headquarters, US 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) opened its command post at An Khe, in central coastal Binh Dinh Province, yesterday. Division strength at the base area currently includes 6,472 personnel out of the 15,800 scheduled to arrive this month.

3. Elements of the US 101st Airborne Brigade completed a battalion-sized sweep today in the highlands 15 miles northeast of An Khe in which the paratroopers wounded three Viet Cong, captured 30, and detained 40 suspects. American casualties were described as "light."

4. Nine USAF B-52 Stratofortresses early today attacked a suspected Viet Cong training, communications, and support area in the guerrilla-infested War Zone "D" stronghold, 25 miles northeast of Saigon. Each aircraft was loaded with 51 750-lb. bombs; initial reports indicate all planes successfully released their ordnance in the target area.

5. The central highlands provincial capital of Pleiku city has been off limits for US military personnel since 11 September because of internal feuding between Vietnamese military units garrisoned

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there. Shots have been exchanged, and knife fights have been reported between Vietnamese Rangers, regular troops, and mountain tribe strike forces. The traditional hostility between the mountain tribesmen of the highlands and the lowland Vietnamese, coupled with the recent operations by government troops against the dissident montagnard organization known as "FULRO," are believed to be the principal factors behind the disturbances.

6. MACV's military report for 13 September shows 74 Communist-initiated incidents, six of which occurred during the 24-hour reporting period. The most significant enemy action of the day occurred in Binh Duong Province, where an estimated Viet Cong battalion supported by 60-mm. mortar and 57-mm. recoilless rifle fire attacked the bivouac position of the 1st Battalion/8th ARVN Regiment near the town of Cau Dinh, inflicting friendly losses of 16 killed, 20 wounded, one missing, and eight weapons captured. The attackers left behind three killed and were believed to have carried away an additional 50 killed or wounded.

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7. According to MACV, Viet Cong tactics now include the use of dogs by squad-sized units to alert the Viet Cong to the presence of government patrols in ambush positions. Three such instances were reported in Kontum Province during the past week. Another new enemy tactic was recently discovered by US forces in the Cam Rang Bay area, where children were apprehended while attempting to mark US defensive gun positions with sticks either propped up in an open area or hidden in nearby bushes.

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8. According to MACV's Weekly Military Report for 4-11 September, the continued absence of large-scale Communist activity throughout South Vietnam supports the belief that the Viet Cong are in an extended period of re-evaluating their plans and programs as well as re-equipping and realigning their units. Statistically, while the total number of guerrilla-initiated incidents increased for the third consecutive week, the overwhelming majority again consisted of small-scale acts of terrorism against the population, antiaircraft fire, mortar and small-arms harassment of district towns, New Life Hamlets, and paramilitary outposts, and sabotage against land lines of communication. Only seven enemy attacks were launched during the week, none of which was of confirmed company- or battalion-strength.

9. A statistical comparison of last week's Viet Cong activity with that of the previous week follows:

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Attacks</u>	<u>Terrorism</u>	<u>Sabotage</u>	<u>Propaganda</u>	<u>AA</u>	<u>Total Incidents</u>
28 Aug- 4 Sept	9	366	57	50	86	568
4-11 Sept	7	372	65	65	129	638

10. Government forces clearly retained the initiative in military operations during the week. "Operation PIRANHA" conducted by multibattalion USMC/ARVN forces against heavily fortified enemy positions in northeast Quang Ngai Province during 6-10 September resulted in 202 Viet Cong killed, 61 captured, and 311 suspects detained. Friendly losses were 11 killed (1 US) and 48 wounded (12 US). Ninety-two Viet Cong were reported killed as the result of a six-day ARVN regimental-strength search, clear, and security operation, reinforced by one USMC battalion, in northern coastal Quang Nam Province. Government casualties totaled 31 killed (3 US), 97 wounded (4 US), and two missing. In northernmost Quang Tri Province, a long-

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term ARVN operation to secure the Ba Long valley reportedly succeeded in disrupting enemy plans for an all-out attack against Quang Tri City.

11. As to the current status of South Vietnam's major transportation routes and the coastal railroad, strategic lateral Route 19 remains closed west of Pleiku city but passable to east; National Route 1 is closed in southern Quang Ngai Province, central Binh Dinh Province, southern Binh Thuan Province, and all of Binh Tuy Province; Route 9 is closed in Quang Tri Province; Route 14 is closed north of Kontum town and throughout Phuoc Long and Binh Long provinces; Route 7 is closed in Phu Yen and Phu Bon provinces; and Route 17 is closed in Kien Giang Province east and west of Rach Gia. Interprovincial Routes 1 and 10 are closed in Binh Duong Province. The coastal railway is operational from Saigon to Xuan Loc (Long Khanh Province); from Song Mao (Binh Thuan Province) to Ninh Hoa (Khanh Hoa Province); from Dalat (Tuyen Duc Province) to Phan Rang (Ninh Thuan Province); and from Da Nang to Dong Ha (Quang Tri Province).

12. ARVN casualties during the period 4-11 September totaled 575 (151 KIA, 401 WIA, and 23 MIA/captured), a decline from the previous week's casualty total of 689 (179 KIA, 410 WIA, and 100 MIA/captured). ARVN weapons losses decreased to 108 from the 380 reported lost last week.

13. During 4-11 September, the Viet Cong sustained 528 known casualties (401 KIA and 127 captured), almost identical to the previous week's total of 531 casualties (422 KIA and 109 captured). Government forces captured 143 weapons (one crew-served in contrast to the 170 weapons (three crew-served) seized during the preceding week.

14. US battle casualties during the 4-11 September MACV reporting period totaled 65 (17 KIA and 48 WIA), a decline from the preceding week's corrected casualty total of 123 (27 KIA, 93 WIA, and 3 MIA/captured). American nonbattle casualties numbered nine (3 deaths and 6 injuries, including one US civilian injured); the previous week's total in this category was 12 (8 deaths and 4 injuries).

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## II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Commenting on his visit to Qui Nhon and Da Nang on 13 September, Ambassador Lodge reports that he was particularly impressed by reports of excellent relations between American and Vietnamese troops and by indications that the performance of US troops is having a beneficial effect on the confidence and performance of the RVNAF. Lodge was told by I Corps commander General Thi that the recent reverses suffered by the Viet Cong were causing the latter to revise their tactics and give greater emphasis to efforts to overthrow the government politically. Lodge reports that he was strongly impressed by the feeling of hope inspired by the American ground presence.

2. In an apparent effort to forestall renewed restiveness among ethnic tribesmen in the central highlands, a ceremony was held today in Ban Me Thuot, and attended by Premier Ky to receive an oath of allegiance from about 400 armed dissidents from FULRO --the tribal autonomy movement. The ceremony was hailed as the end of the tribal rebellion. Despite the fanfare, tribal dissatisfaction and Vietnamese distrust of the tribes are likely to persist. About 1,200-1,500 FULRO followers still remain outside the government fold, at least a third of whom are known to be armed.

3. Officials of Saigon's Ministry of National Economy have informed officers of the US Embassy and USOM that the Ky government intends shortly to establish a permanent Rice Bureau, probably subordinate to the wartime Office of Supply. The two basic aims of government policy were described as the lessening of dependence on private traders and the collection of as much of the 1965-1966 rice crop as possible. The government also intends to form a private company of Vietnamese nationals to compete with present Chinese merchants, and to rely on this Vietnamese company and agricultural cooperatives for collection of rice. The government hopes to maintain a 200,000

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metric ton stockpile in Saigon, plus another 64,000 metric tons (or two-month supply) in central Vietnam. To acquire this amount in the early months of 1966, it plans to set a maximum price for government purchases by November with the caveat that the price will be lowered later in 1966.

4. The embassy believes that its reservations about the policy of increased government control of the rice trade are shared by the economy ministry officials--particularly the danger that squeezing out private Chinese will upset distribution and encourage greater Viet Cong interdiction efforts. The embassy also believes that the magnitude of the government stockpile and willingness to use it remain key factors, since normally the government purchase price can be matched or exceeded by both private traders and the Viet Cong.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. Nothing of significance to report.

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## V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. DRV spokesmen called a special press conference on 15 September to express concern over the recent bomb damage to the dam and dike system of North Vietnam. In a formal statement the Ministry of Water Conservancy accused the US of trying to "create floods, drought, and famine" by destroying the water conservation installations built by the Communist regime "at immense cost." Like the recent protests over the alleged use of poison gas in South Vietnam, today's allegations seem designed to arouse world opinion over the effects of US military action on the civilian population of the DRV.

2. The Water Ministry's statement claimed that the Ban Thach Dam in Thanh Hoa Province and the Suoi Hai Dam in Ha Tay Province had been subjected to repeated bombings. The Ban Thach Dam was apparently destroyed during the August 27-30 bombings of the important hydroelectric facility located at Ban Thach. The Suoi Hai Dam, however, which the North Vietnamese claim was bombed on 9, 10, and 12 September, is located in Ha Tay Province which is immediately south and west of Hanoi. No primary targets have been struck in this area, and it is north of the boundaries established for armed reconnaissance flights. The province is within the SAM envelope which protects the capital city and US aircraft are under orders not to enter the area. Although the North Vietnamese seem to be exaggerating the extent of the damage done to their water systems, the protest does indicate DRV concern over the possibility that the present bombing pattern may be intended to disrupt agricultural production and the food supply.

3. Dang Quang Minh, NFLSV representative in Moscow, is leading a delegation of Front officials to Eastern bloc capitals in an apparent effort to secure additional Communist support

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for the Viet Cong position on the war in South Vietnam. The group arrived in Sofia on 3 September where it received pledges of support--including volunteers "when necessary"--from Bulgarian officials. The delegation's next stop was Budapest where it arrived on 14 September for a ten day visit which will include meetings with Hungarian officials and a tour of the provinces.

4. [redacted]  
[redacted] the Soviets continue their effort to play down the extent of their military involvement in Vietnam. The Soviet chief of the Defense Ministry political directorate, General Yepishev, during a recent [redacted]

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[redacted] admitted that SAMs had been sent to Vietnam, but following the same line taken by other Soviet representatives, claimed that Soviet personnel were no longer involved.

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5. Yepishev warned that Vietnam would cost the US many years of fighting, since the Chinese would "fight to the last Vietnamese" before committing their own personnel. He suggested that talks might be arranged "in absolute secrecy" with the North Vietnamese, but continued to insist that there were several preconditions. He argued that the US must (1) stop its air strikes against the DRV, and (2) halt all US combat operations. As in earlier Soviet approaches Yepishev suggested that Hanoi might drop any insistence that US troops be withdrawn from Vietnam prior to negotiations.

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